

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L MOSCOW 4445

EXDIS

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TAGS: PFOR, UR, US, PO

SUBJ: TALK WITH PORTUGUESE AMBASSADOR TO MOSCOW

REF: LISBON 1799

1. SUMMARY. PORTUGUESE AMBASSADOR NEVES TOLD ME MARCH 31 THAT KOSYGIN HAD GIVEN PORTUGUESE LABOR MINISTER COSTA MARTINS AN ASSURANCE OF SOVIET AID TO THE PORTUGUESE ECONOMY THROUGH DIRECT PURCHASES. NEVES EMPHASIZED THAT THE U.S., AND THE WEST IN GENERAL, WERE MAKING A MISTAKE IN REDUCING THEIR ECONOMIC TIES TO PORTUGAL. THE PICTURE HE CREATED WAS OF AN ECONOMIC VACUUM IN THE COUNTRY WHICH THE SOVIETS WERE PREPARED TO FILL IF THE WEST DID NOT. WHILE THE NATIONAL SELF-INTEREST IN HIS APPROACH IS OBVIOUS, I CERTAINLY WOULD NOT DISMISS OUT OF HAND HIS ASSERTION THAT THE SOVIETS ARE PREPARED TO PROVIDE PORTUGAL SOME ECONOMIC RELIEF. END SUMMARY.

2. AMBASSADOR NEVES, WHO WAS IN LISBON AT THE TIME OF THE MARCH 11 COUP ATTEMPT AND RETURNED LATE LAST WEEK TO THE SOVIET UNION, SAID THAT COSTA MARTINS' MISSION WAS BASICALLY DEVOTED TO TRYING TO PERSUADE THE USSR TO BUY MORE PORTUGUESE EXPORTS. AS LABOR MINISTER, COSTA MARTINS EMPHASIZED TO KOSYGIN, BY WHOM HE WAS RECEIVED MARCH 26, THAT THE ECONOMIC

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SITUATION IN PORTUGAL WAS EXTREMELY GRAVE AND THAT MANY PEOPLE

WERE OUT OF WORK. HE SOUGHT KOSYGIN'S AGREEMENT TO SOVIET PURCHASES OF PORTUGUESE PRODUCTS. ACCORDING TO AMBASSADOR NEVES (WHO HAD NOT RETURNED TO MOSCOW BY THE TIME OF THE MEETING), KOSYGIN WAS VERY IMPRESSED WITH COSTA MARTINS' DESCRIPTION, AND GAVE HIM AN ASSURANCE THAT THE SOVIET UNION WOULD BE PREPARED TO BUY PORTUGUESE EXPORTS--NEVES MENTIONED TEXTILES AND WINE SPECIFICALLY-FOR HARD CURRENCY.

3. NEVES DESCRIBED HIMSELF AS CONVINCED THAT THE SOVIETS ARE SERIOUS IN THEIR ECONOMIC ASSURANCES, AND NOTES IN PASSING THAT THE ESCUDO, FOLLOWING COSTA MARTINS' MEETING WITH KOSYGIN, HAS BEGUN TO BE TREATED AS A HARD CURRENCY IN HARD CURRENCY STORES IN MOSCOW. THE AMBASSADOR TWICE REITERATED THE POINT THAT THE U.S. WAS MAKING A MISTAKE IN REDUCING ITS ECONOMIC TIES TO PORTUGAL. HE NOTED IN PARTICULAR THE PORTUGUESE DIFFICULTY IN SELLING TEXTILES (A PROBLEM WHICH HE CONCEDED PRE-DATED THE APRIL REVOLUTION) AND ELECTRONIC PRODUCTS TO THE U.S.

4. NEVES TOLD ME THAT HE BELIEVES THE SOVIETS REMAIN DEEPLY INTERESTED IN DETENTE, AND DO NOT WANT ANYTHING TO HAPPEN IN PORTUGAL WHICH WOULD SERIOUSLY AFFECT THAT POLICY. HE SAID THAT HE BELIEVED THE SOVIETS WOULD OPPOSE A CLEAR TAKEOVER BY THE PORTUGUESE COMMUNIST PARTY, SINCE THIS COULD LEAD TO A CIVIL WAR AND COULD IMPERIL OVERALL SOVIET AIMS TOWARD THE WEST. HE NOTED, HOWEVER, THAT SOVIETS MAY NO LONGER WIELD A DECISIVE INFLUENCE OVER PCP LEADER CUNHAL.

5. NEVES SHED NO LIGHT ON THE VISIT OF PCP SECRETARY PATO TO MOSCOW. HE WAS CLEARLY NOT INVOLVED IN THE VISIT IN ANY WAY, AND SEEMED TO BE IGNORANT OF THE FACT THAT KATUSHEV, WHO RECEIVED PATO, NORMALLY DEALS WITH RULING COMMUNIST PARTIES.

6. NEVES SAID THAT HE HAD BEEN TOLD BY THE NEW FOREIGN MINISTER, MAJOR ANTUNES, THAT HE SHOULD BE SURE TO MAINTAIN CLOSE TIES WITH HIS AMERICAN COLLEAGUE IN MOSCOW. HE SAID ANTUNES ALSO ASSURED HIM THAT PORTUGAL WOULD REMAIN FAITHFUL TO ITS OBLIGATIONS.

7. WHILE IN LISBON, NEVES HAD A MEETING WITH CUNHAL. CUNHAL
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REFERRED TO THE VIEWS OF SOME THAT THE SOVIETS MIGHT ABANDON PORTUGAL IN THE INTERESTS OF DETENTE AND THAT THEY HAD A KIND OF "TREATY OF Tordesillas" WITH THE U.S. DIVIDING THE WORLD INTO SPHERES OF INFLUENCE. CUNHAL, ACCORDING TO NEVES, DISPUTED SUCH VIEWS, BUT NEVES FELT THAT CUNHAL WAS SOMEWHAT CONCERNED THAT THEY MIGHT BE TRUE. CUNHAL MADE IT CLEAR TO NEVES, HOWEVER, THAT THE SOVIETS COULD NOT STAND ASIDE IF THERE WERE "INTERFERENCE" IN PORTUGAL. CUNHAL MADE NO BONES ABOUT THE PCP'S

VIEWS ON NATO, BUT SAID THAT AS A MEMBER OF THE GOVERNMENT, HE WOULD STAND BY PORTUGAL'S CURRENT OBLIGATIONS. HE SAID, HOWEVER, THAT IF "THE WILL OF THE PEOPLE" DECLARES ITSELF OTHERWISE, THEN THOSE OBLIGATIONS COULD CHANGE.

8. NEVES ALSO HAD A SESSION WITH PRIME MINISTER GONCALVES. HE TOLD GONCALVES THAT IN HIS TALKS IN LISBON HE HAD NOTED A GREAT AMOUNT OF BICKERING BETWEEN POLITICAL PARTIES AND EFFORTS TO GAIN ADVANTAGE. GONCALVES HEATEDLY AGREED ABOUT THE UNHELPFULNESS OF SUCH ATTITUDES AND URGED NEVES TO STRESS THAT POINT WITH HIS POLITICAL CONTACTS.

9. NEVES ALSO HAD A SESSION WITH SOCIALIST PARTY LEADER SOARES, WHO DESCRIBED HIS PARTY'S RELATIONS WITH THE COMMUNISTS AS VERY BAD. SOARES SAID HE HAD DEBATED WHETHER TO PULL OUT OF THE GOVERNMENT BUT HAD DECIDED TO STAY ON SINCE A WITHDRAWAL WOULD LEAVE THE FIELD TO THE COMMUNISTS. SOARES TOLD NEVES THAT HE THOUGHT THE SOCIALISTS WOULD GET ABOUT TWICE AS MANY VOTES IN THE APRIL ELECTION AS THE COMMUNISTS. ACCORDING TO NEVES, SOARES SAID HE HAD NOT DECIDED ON WHETHER HE WOULD PERSONALLY STAND IN THE ELECTION, SINCE HE WOULD HAVE TO GIVE UP HIS PLACE IN THE GOVERNMENT IN ORDER TO SIT IN THE CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY. THE AMBASSADOR NOTED THE POOR ORGANIZATION OF THE SOCIALISTS, WHICH CONTRASTED SHARPLY WITH THE DISCIPLINE OF THE PCP.

10. IN GIVING HIS OWN IMPRESSIONS OF THE POLITICAL SCENE IN LISBON, NEVES DISCOUNTED THE IMPORTANCE OF THE ELECTIONS, SINCE HE FELT THE CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY WOULD HAVE VIRTUALLY NO POLITICAL POWER AND WOULD NOT AFFECT THE GOVERNMENT'S OR THE REVOLUTIONARY COUNCIL'S DAY-TO-DAY ACTIONS. HE WAS TOLD THAT CUNHAL WILL NOT TAKE A SEAT IN THE CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY BECAUSE HE IS UNWILLING TO GIVE UP HIS MINISTERIAL POSITION.
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NEVES DESCRIBED THE REVOLUTIONARY COUNCIL AS VIRTUALLY THE SOLE SEAT OF POWER AND EVEN DISCOUNTED THE AFM AS A POLITICAL FORCE; HE SAID THE COUNCIL SPEAKS ENTIRELY FOR THE AFM. HE SAID THERE WAS NO QUESTION THAT THE REVOLUTIONARY COUNCIL HAS A PROFOUNDLY LEFTIST ORIENTATION. HE ADDED THAT, BEFORE THE APRIL REVOLUTION, HE HAD PREDICTED THAT THE GOVERNMENT'S POLICY OF DRAFTING UNIVERSITY STUDENTS FOR SERVICE IN AFRICA WOULD RADICALIZE THE ARMY AND CAUSE A REVOLUTION AND THIS IS EXACTLY WHAT HAPPENED.

11. ON SPINOLA, NEVES SAID THAT JUST AFTER THE MARCH 11 ATTEMPT, MANY PORTUGUESE COULD NOT BELIEVE THAT SPINOLA HAD ACTUALLY BEEN INVOLVED, BUT HE SAID THERE IS LITTLE DOUBT OF IT NOW. HE SAID THERE WERE TWO BASIC THEORIES ABOUT THE COUP ATTEMPT. ONE WAS THAT SPINOLA EXPECTED THE COUP ATTEMPT,

BECAUSE OF HIS OWN INVOLVEMENT AND PRESTIGE, TO HAVE A
RIPPLE EFFECT THROUGHOUT THE MILITARY. THE OTHER WAS THAT
SPINOLA HAD BEEN PROMISED ASSISTANCE BY SEVERAL MAJOR MILITARY
FIGURES, WHO THEN GOT COLD FEET AT THE LAAST MOMENT. NEVES
SAID THAT SPINOLA HAD ALLOWED HIMSELF TO BECOME ASSOCIATED
WITH SOME UNSAVORY ELEMENTS, INCLUDING AN OFFICER WHO HAD
TRIED TO PROVOKE A COUP IN CONAKRY SEVERAL YEARS AGO.

12. I PLAN TO KEEP IN CLOSE TOUCH WITH AMBASSADOR NEVES,
AND WOULD BE GLAD TO RAISE WITH HIM ANY SPECIFIC POINTS
THAT MAY OCCUR TO THE DEPARTMENT OR TO EMBASSY LISBON.

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